

### If hockey were taught the way science is usually taught. . . .

For the first 6 years of their lives, children would occasionally hear about something called hockey.

During primary school, they would be told a little about hockey. The game would be presented strictly as a set of facts: winning teams, a few star players, history of the game, size of the ice surface, etc. They would be tested on their ability to recollect these facts.

During high school they would learn a little more about the game, and maybe be allowed to watch segments of an actual game during a school trip. During their last years of high school they might be taught to pass the puck back and forth, and to skate, but never to do both at the same time.

In university they would, for the first time, have coaches who have actually played the game professionally. Depending on the institution, the coaches could either be retired or active players, established super-stars or eager rookies, and everything in between. However, students would continue to be indoctrinated in the classroom, not an actual arena, despite there being one on-site. For the most part, they would still be under the impression that hockey is nothing more than a set of facts, to be memorized until the end of the term. Sometimes, under strict supervision, they would be told how to replicate some classic games. Up to this point, they have never played an actual game.

During the summer, a few students would be allowed to participate in a few games as part of a team, usually just as towel boys/girls.

In their latter university years, some students, unknowingly enrolled in teams led by iconoclastic coaches, will be expected to play an actual game for the first time in their lives. The prospect of an actual game will be feared by many, who, having been indoctrinated with the idea that hockey is just a set of facts to be memorized and instructions to be followed, would vehemently resist any attempts to make them play an actual game. They will complain to the league manager, who will try to convince the coach that memorization is the most important part to the game, not teamwork, problem-solving or creative play-making. A few players will actually welcome the opportunity and rise to the challenge. For the first time in their hockey careers, they will be able to innovate, to produce a creative play, to study their opponents, to find the best strategies, to throw a body check, to receive a body check, to fall, to get up, and to actually develop their hockey skills. By the end of the season everyone will have enjoyed it, and even the recalcitrant players will reluctantly admit it, but for many it will be too late; 20 years of indoctrination are not easily erased.

A few players will try to extend that experience during their remaining time in university and seek out the few other coaches who emphasize actually playing the game. Only after such experiences, they will finally begin to truly appreciate the game and determine in what capacity they will participate for the rest of their lives: players, management, support staff or knowledgeable fans. A subset of these students will love the game enough to enlist in advanced hockey schools where they will learn the intricacies of the game and develop into professional hockey players.

The irony is that these children and young adults have lived and will live all their lives in a hockey arena, and every aspect of their lives, more so with each passing day, depends and will depend on hockey and their knowledge of the game.